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The ḥagoroth of Genesis 37

The *ḥagorah* in later time designates without exception a certain kind of loin-girdle (II Sam. 18 11; I Kings 2 5; II Kings 3 21 etc.); only in one passage, Gen. 37, does it apparently denote a kind of apron, which was made of fig-leaves, and which seemingly differed only in regard to material from the ordinary loin-cloth, or the short skirt as worn for instance by the early Sumerians. It would therefore appear that the word *ḥagorah*, as many other words designating garments, has undergone a change of meaning. That this, however, is not the case, it is the object of the following note, to show.

Some of the archaic Babylonian cylinder seals present to us the fact that it was the custom among the early Sumerians simply to tie a cord a few times around the loins. To the front of the cord were attached generally two small pieces of cloth to hide the privy parts; these two flaps serving a similar purpose as the *Phallustasche* among the pre-dynastic Egyptians, and among the Libyans down to a comparatively late period. For this ancient Sumerian custom see for instance Ward, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, p. 43, No. 110a and p. 55, No. 138b. The statue of the god Min, discovered at Koptos, and now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, shows as the only garment a girdle which is wound eight times round the body, one end of the girdle falling down the right side and widening toward the base. Among the lower classes in Egypt in the time of the Old and Middle Kingdoms it was often customary to wear only a girdle from which hung a special small piece of cloth, which could be pushed to the side or even to the back in case it was in the way during hard work (see e. g. Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep*, II, pls. 5, 7, 8, 17, 21, 22, 23; Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, II, 61b, 69, 70, 101b, 102). Sometimes the middle piece was drawn between the legs, and the end fastened to the girdle in the back, like an infant's diaper.

These considerations would tend to show that the *ḥagoroth* mentioned in Genesis 37 consisted of girdles which were wound once or more often around the loins, and to which were fastened, instead of the pieces of cloth, fig-leaves, which had been sewed together.




In view of the fact, furthermore, that the text reads וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עָלָהּ תַּאֲנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עָלָהּ תַּאֲנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת it seems most likely that the *hagorah*, or *hagor* in the other passages where the word occurs, no more means "girdle", than it does "apron" or "loin-cloth" in Genesis 37. In every instance it means the girdle plus the additional shame-cover, be it in the form of leaves or in the form of small pieces of cloth. The *hagorah* is the oldest piece of garment seen on the monuments both of Egypt and Sumer, and, of course, was the predecessor of the loin-cloth.

The *hagorah*, in other words, is very similar to the priestly *mikhnas*, which may be a development of the *hagorah*. According to Exod. 28 42 the *mikhnas* serves the purpose לְכִסּוֹת בָּשָׂר לְכִסּוֹת בָּשָׂר וְעַד-יְרֵכָיִם יְהִי. Josephus describes the *mikhnas* similarly as "a girdle composed of fine twined linen and is put about the privy parts, the feet to be inserted into them in the manner of breeches, but about half of it is cut off, and it ends at the thighs, and is there tied fast". Brown-Driver-Briggs renders *mikhnas* by "drawers" which of course is absolutely wrong. Notice especially that also Josephus terms the *mikhnas* a "girdle", and his description leaves no doubt what we have to understand by it. Also here as in the case of the "layman's" *hagorah* it is primarily a girdle, to which, however, is fastened a piece of cloth which is drawn between the legs and fastened at the back of the girdle; the cloth being wide enough to cover the loins and especially the inner part of the upper legs. It thus resembled somewhat short breeches as indicated by Josephus.

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Kû, "thread, cord" in Egyptian

In Egyptian the idea of "spinning" is expressed by the word *sty*,  from which the verbal noun *sty.t* ,  "thread, cord" is derived. The root *sty*, Coptic core is preserved in Hebrew שָׁתִי "warp", which is given in Hebrew dictionaries under the root שָׁתָה. It is rather curious that in Arabic the root appears with > and ت in سدى and